

Testimony of
Faith Sweeney
K-5 Literacy Coach
NEA Teaching Fellow

Education Committee

HB 6884 AAC the Recruitment, Retention and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession
SB 1199 AAC Equity in Education
March 15, 2023

My name is Faith Sweeney. I have been a teacher for 27 years. I am a K-5 Literacy Coach with Westport Public Schools, and I am currently serving as a Teaching Fellow with the National Education Association working with CEA.

I am writing in support of **HB 6884 AAC the Recruitment, Retention and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession** and the removal of the term “minority” proposed in **SB 1199 AAC Equity in Education**.

HB 6884 AAC the Recruitment, Retention and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession

I love being a teacher, and I know I am making a positive impact on our future leaders of the world. However, the education profession has become overburdened with unnecessary structures, policies, and practices derailing our attention from the science of teaching, the creativity and joy of learning, and the focus on what really matters, our students. According to NORC at the University of Chicago.¹ “Fewer than one in five Americans (18 percent) would encourage a young person to become a K-12 teacher, citing low pay, lack of sufficient school resources, and a stressful work environment as major barriers.” Changes need to be made to stop this stigma and create better working conditions to recruit and retain people into the education profession.

This bill fosters positive steps towards improving the recruitment rate of new teachers into the education profession. Raising the starting salary for beginning teachers so they are not working below the poverty level will have a positive impact on the recruitment of teachers. Providing tax credits for initial and provisional educators as they start out in this career will have a positive impact on the recruitment of teachers. Ending edTPA assessment and reducing or eliminating any costs or fees charged to students enrolled in teacher preparation programs will have a positive impact on the recruitment of

¹ https://www.norc.org/NewsEventsPublications/PressReleases/Pages/survey-few-americans-would-encourage-a-young-person-to-become-a-teacher.aspx?hsamp_network=twitter&hsamp=bTKPAhTYI4r7

teachers. These steps and more written in the bill will break down barriers that prevent many qualified students from entering the field of education.

Educators have shared their needs for years. According to a recent Connecticut Education Association survey, “Nearly three-quarters of educators (74%) say that compared to a few years ago, they are more likely to leave the profession or retire early.”² Working conditions continue to be increasingly stressful due to a lack of respect and trust teachers receive while working with students daily. Salary enhancement will be a great benefit for the teaching profession, but the day-to-day workload and lack of resources requires improvement as well.

There are many sections of this bill that can make positive changes to improve the teaching profession and retain educators. The September Kindergarten start age of 5 years old will help educators effectively respond to the developmental needs of students which will help retain teachers. The implementation of play based learning will provide creativity and flexibility to help our students meet standards which will improve the retention of teachers. Uninterrupted prep time will allow teachers to focus on reflection, modification, and implementation of lessons which will help retain teachers. Protection against harassment and physical threats will create a sense of safety all educators should feel as they serve their communities which will help with retention. Protection while performing duties as a teacher is necessary, and teachers should not fear retaliation for doing their job which will help retain teachers. Teachers having a voice that is respected as a professional in the field of education as well as being members of the State Board of Education and Commissioner’s Teacher Advisory Committee will help retain teachers. Now more than ever, it is time to honor the requests of educators for the sake of retaining educators and maintaining a quality educational system.

The recruitment and retention of teachers in Connecticut is in a state of crisis. The teacher shortage is negatively impacting the quality of education all students receive. This bill offers strategies to give the teaching profession the respect it deserves, the resources it needs, and the support it requires to ensure that all of our students receive the dynamic education they deserve.

SB 1199 An Act Concerning Equity in Education

I fully support the removal of the term “Minority” to describe culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse people, as proposed in this bill.

² <https://cea.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/112222-boards-for-News-Conference.pdf>

It is necessary to cease using the word “Minority”. “Minority” means less than and when used in context about people is defined as, “...*, a culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group that coexists with but is subordinate to a more dominant group. As the term is used in the social sciences, this subordinacy is the chief defining characteristic of a minority group. As such, minority status does not necessarily correlate to population.*”³

Not only is the word minority part of the White Supremacy culture, it does not define culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse groups of people accurately. As the state looks to recruit educators of color and build cultural and language diversity, it is important to see this diverse representation as an asset to the educational system. The term minority has too many negative connotations, and is not uplifting to the groups of people you wish to recruit and retain as educators in this state. I would suggest using culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse because minority refers to culture, ethnicity, and race. Diversity is too broad of a term.

The accountability measure for districts to proactively recruit and hire culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse candidates for their teaching population is necessary. Efforts to recruit and retain these diverse groups of educators should be more than just a mere checkbox. It is vital to ensure that culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse educators are seen, heard, and represented as an integral part of the structures, policies and practices implemented by districts.

Thank you for your consideration.

Faith Sweeney
K-5 Literacy Coach
NEA Teaching Fellow

³ See <https://www.britannica.com> › topic › minority